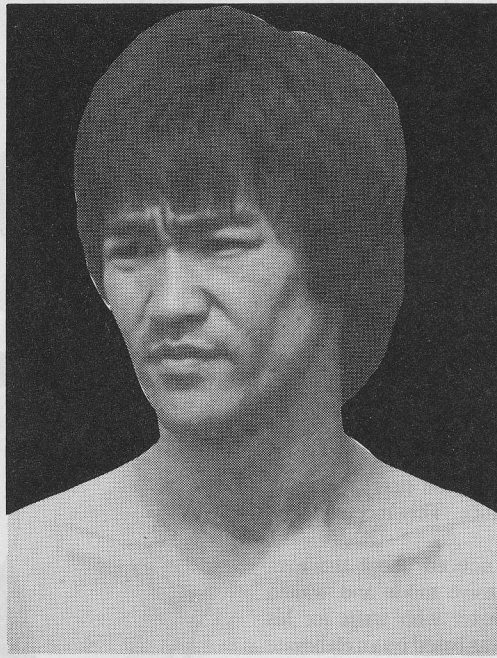




Bruce Lee's Non-Classical Sticking Hands

Bruce Lee believed the secret to wing chun's sticking hands technique was simplicity, directness, and repetition.

By Jessie R. Glover

When I first met Bruce in 1959, what impressed me most was his ability in the wing chun art of sticking hands. Sticking hands is a unique infighting technique based on the development of a radar-like sensing ability in the arms which can detect openings in an opponent's defensive system while simultaneously closing off his avenues of attack. A highly trained practitioner can control the attacks of a novice in ways that seem magical.

When I sparred with Bruce I never got in a single strike unless he let me. I was so taken with the sticking aspect of his art that I talked him into sticking with me every time we worked out. During the first few months of my training, this was at least twice a day, six days a week. The instant Bruce made contact with my arms I could neither resist nor escape his control. Whenever I came close to mounting some sort of effective defense, Bruce would change his sticking tempo, angle or pressure and I would find myself completely lost, unable to cope with this new twist. Because of these exciting, interesting and frustrating sticking experiences, sticking became my

major area of focus and I have spent close to 30 years trying to perfect this aspect of Bruce's art.

If I had met Bruce a few months later, I don't think I would have learned nearly as much as I did about sticking hands. Bruce was developing at such a rapid rate that the concept of sticking was becoming less and less important to his art; his focus was switching more toward kicking and single-punching attacks. Fortunately when I met him he still regarded sticking hands as a vital skill.

The major problem I experienced in sticking hands was developing and maintaining the correct arm positions. When I first learned sticking hands, Bruce was in an experimental phase and he was applying more and more pressure in his sticking. This strong forward pressure tired out my arms so rapidly that I had to stop several times during every sticking session because I simply couldn't raise them to the required positions. Because I stopped and took frequent rest periods, these sticking sessions were for Bruce, but in those days he was more patient and obliging than he was later in his career.

Bruce taught me the first wing chun form, sil lim tao, the first

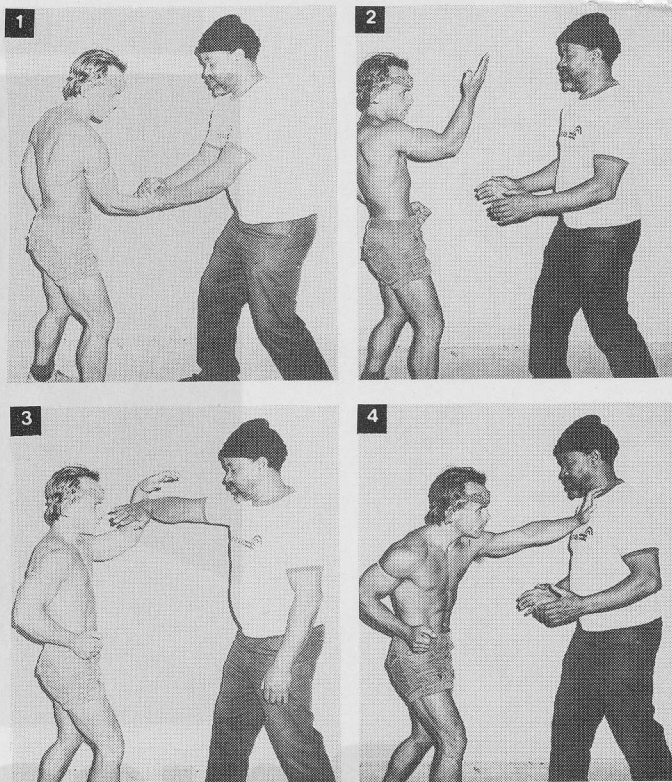
month I knew him. He told me that mastering this form would surely firm up my sticking positions. I practiced this form several times a day to increase my endurance, but Bruce continued to burn out my shoulder muscles after a couple minutes of sticking. My saving grace was that after a few months of sticking with Bruce I used many of the sticking techniques against other students. This convinced me that there was some hope for developing adequate sticking skills.

For a period I thought that all classical sticking was like Bruce's. It wasn't until I had my first experience with a classical sticker that I realized the difference in the two approaches. I was teaching a couple of people from Portland, a city about 180 miles south of Seattle. They drove up to practice on the weekends. One day they told me about a man in Portland who did wing chun and said that if I was interested they would set up a meeting. A few days later I was on my way to Portland.

When I met him, we talked for a while and he told me he was a combined wing chun and praying mantis stylist. When we worked out he couldn't cope with either my sticking or closing attacks. At the close of our training session he asked me to instruct him and I politely declined. I returned from the trip a little shaken because I had expected the man to be more like Bruce. This meeting took place in the mid-'60s.

When we worked out, the first thing I noticed about the man from Portland was how he adopted a defensive mode and waited for my attack — like a counterpunching boxer who waits for his opponent to make the first move. His defense was based on an elaborate system that sought to give an adequate response to each incoming attack. When he displayed this system in slow motion, it worked well but I couldn't see how it could work against an opponent who could move as quick or quicker than he could react. He was not successful in stopping or deflecting my attacks. I attributed this to reaction time lag.

Bruce knew about reaction time lag long before I arrived. Reaction time lag is the time that it takes a person to become aware that something is happening and respond. It is not instantaneous and if



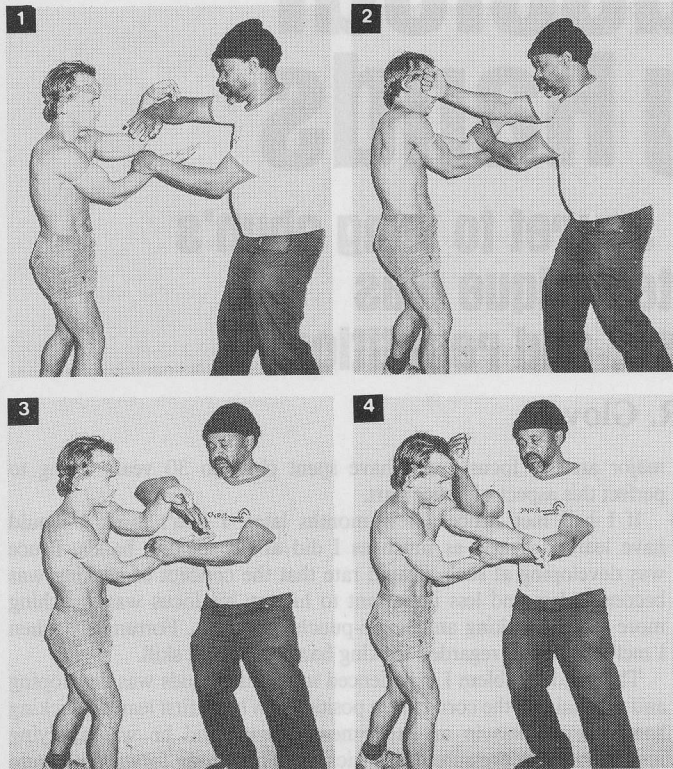
Other major changes in Bruce's sticking included the increased use of strong forward pressure in his sticking attacks, the substitution of his palm in place of the traditional fook sau striking position, and the habit of initiating attacks rather than waiting to respond to attacks.

your opponent lacks a telegraphing movement, it is difficult, if not impossible, to block (if he is in touching range).

Bruce experimented with various techniques to eliminate or lessen the effects of reaction time lag on sticking. The first area was strengthening the sticking hands positions. He surmised that the correct placement of the hands and arms against an opponent's arms could stop or at least deflect some incoming strikes. Bruce retained many of the classical wing chun hand positions but he held his hands, elbows and forearms in ways that prevented attacks from reaching his body by blocking direct access or by deflecting incoming strikes to the side. By presenting stable, static arm positions, it allowed him to launch counterattacks without having to move his arms to deflect incoming strikes. To supplement these protective arm positions, Bruce developed the major inside forearm muscles, thereby aiding blocking and deflection of incoming attacks. His development of Popeye-like forearms contributed to his defense in the following ways: it was more difficult for opponents to come in directly because they presented a larger defensive shield; the increased curve of the forearms deflected energy to the side and increased the length of time that the defending forearm remained in contact with the opponent's attacking arm; and the friction of this contact worked to break the incoming force and acted like a radar that alerts the defender to increase the inward deflection angle of the forearm in response to the attack.

Another area that Bruce explored was the integration of the backfist as a major sticking weapon. He felt that it could eliminate many of the classical sticking hands responses by nullifying their lines of attack. Other major changes in his sticking were the increased use of strong forward pressure in his sticking attacks, the substitution of his palm in place of the traditional fook sau sticking position (a change that gave him greater control and sensitivity whenever he made contact), and the habit of initiating attacks rather than waiting to respond to attacks.

The techniques I use and teach today are in some ways quite different from what I learned from Bruce. You see, Bruce gave me a sticking framework on which to place the many concepts and techniques that he knew I would experiment with over the years. He did not give



Bruce Lee explored the integration of the backfist as a major sticking weapon (1-4). He felt that it could eliminate many of the classical sticking hands responses by nullifying their lines of attack. In this example, Glover fires the backfist to the side of the opponent's head off two basic positions.

me a “cast-in-stone” format to follow. My task in sticking has been to fill in the gaps in the framework. I have been fairly successful in this area, mainly because my approach works well for my students, which is supported by them successfully passing it on to others.

Non-classical gung-fu is the name I use for the approach I practice and teach. The basis for this approach is built on the instruction that I received from Bruce. I use non-classical gung-fu and not some other name because of what Bruce told me when I asked him about instructing other people. He said it was all right to teach as long as I didn’t call what I was teaching either wing chun or Jun Fan gung-fu. Since then, I have added things from many sources and the name non-classical gung-fu has taken shape.

When I began to instruct people in Bruce’s approach to sticking in the early ’60s, I ran into a series of problems. The first was lacking the muscular development to maintain my arms in a static position like Bruce’s. Without these solid static arm positions I couldn’t present the proper pressure sticking structure for students to work against. I could use Bruce’s sticking concepts against other people, but still not teach them with the effectiveness that I desired. In the early ’70s, I realized that if I wanted to teach an effective form of sticking hands, I had to develop some way to supplement the techniques and concepts I learned from Bruce. What I needed was some type of exercise that could build up a student’s arms and shoulders in ways that would

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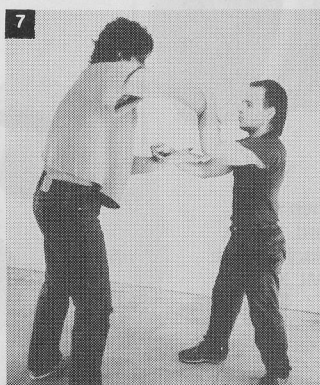
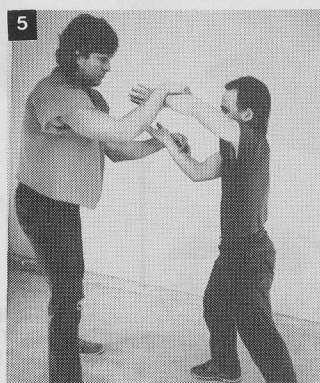
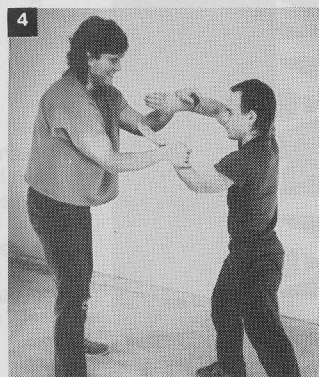
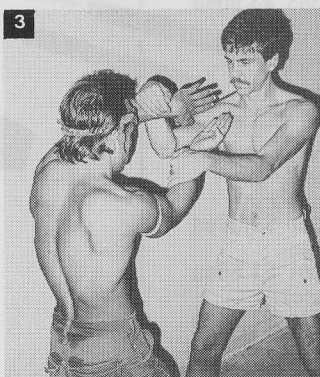
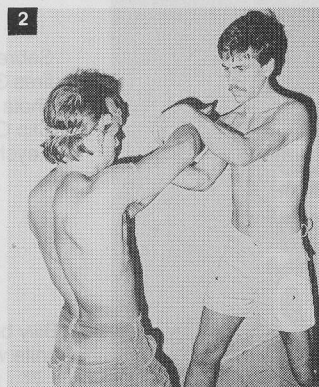
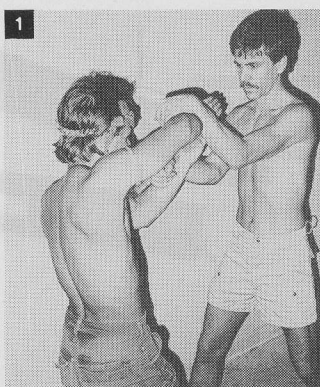
— The author

allow him to practice the sticking rotation sequence for more than a few minutes before he became exhausted. My brother, Mike, was experimenting with a series of exercises for his “nova” system and one of his arm exercises gave me an idea for the basic format I was seeking. I took the few basic hand positions from the wing chun system that Bruce had taught me and applied them to a series of hand movements that paralleled some of the movements my brother was using. When I began to instruct my students in these exercises, they responded like a sick person responds to a wonder drug. Soon they had the strength to carry out the sticking training for long periods without tiring while the weak areas of their upper body and arms became stronger than corresponding areas in stronger people. They also improved their punching power and established and maintained static arm positions. Over the years I have taught these techniques to many students and most have become proficient at sticking hands. What pleases me most is that they have applied these techniques when they have traveled to other areas. For me the true test of a method is if ordinary people can develop and put it to good use. This makes it a valid approach that can make the average person a more functional fighter.

In the early ’80s, I traveled to Europe and did a number of seminars for a top wing chun organization. While there, I had several sticking sessions with the head of that organization and he told me several times that while my sticking was crude, he couldn’t stop it. Since I regard this man’s organization as one of the better ones in the world, I took his comment to be a compliment. I have never been one to care much about the way something looks; only if it works.

The differences in angles, pressure, weapons and concepts prevent me from calling what I do wing chun; this stuff simply doesn’t follow many of the guidelines of that art. By the same token I cannot say that what I teach is Bruce’s method because I have added many things to it. What I *can* say is that this approach owes a debt to both wing chun and Bruce Lee, because without wing chun Bruce would have never had the information he passed on, and without Bruce I would have never learned the things that allowed me to develop the sticking techniques and concepts I teach today.

Three of Bruce’s ideas that have been valuable guidelines in my sticking development are simplicity, directness and repetition. Make techniques as simple as possible, avoid complexity for the sake of looking good and constantly look for ways to perform a technique



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with less movement. Reduce the number of techniques you try to perfect, because it is better to have a few techniques that work most of the time, than to have a great many techniques that work every now and then. The amazing thing about repetition is what happens when you take a few well-founded techniques and practice them a few hundred thousand times over an adequate period that allows the proper development of tendons, ligaments and muscles. In time, techniques will occur in response to the proper stimulus as if you were born with them. Performing the same number of repetitions over an inadequate period will do little more than damage your body.

About the Author: Seattle, Washington-based Jessie R. Glover was Bruce Lee’s first American student.